Barbara Parmenter, Chair

The Committee met twice during the 2017-2018 academic year, on September 22 and December 5, 2017. A third meeting was scheduled for May 13, 2018 but had to be canceled due to the very sorrowful news that day that Tufts VP and CIO David Kahle has passed away. We will dearly miss David - his energy, intelligence, commitment, and leadership.

At the September meeting, David Kahle gave an overview to the committee of the various major IT initiatives that would affect and/or create opportunities for teaching and research. This included the Library’s move to the Ex Libris system which will enable the library to integrate resources across the library system, and also connect seamlessly to Canvas, the new learning management system starting in Summer 2018. David also updated us on the good progress made to get faculty enrolled in 2-factor authentication prior to the December health insurance enrollment period. He also introduced Jesse Anderson, the new Associate Director of Audio Visual and Media Services at Tufts.

Larry Thomas, Director of Data Strategy, gave a brief overview of the NextGeneration Technology Stack. The “NextGen” data warehouse goals are to handle any type of data, any volume of data, allow a range of computations to be performed, to decouple data storage from computation, and to do all this in a more economical way than the current system. Tufts has chosen HADOOP to be the platform, and Apache Spark, to run on that. Apache Spark is widely used across the data analytics industry, is open source, and is easy to use with R, Python, and other languages.

Patrick Florance is the Associate Director, Geospatial Technology Services, and he introduced Annie Swafford, Tufts’ new Digital Humanities Specialist. Annie discussed the plans to support faculty and students to use digital humanities tools. She can act as a consultant for faculty and students interested in projects involving digital tools, can do classroom presentations about the variety of digital tools available, is organizing workshops like text analysis (see Data Lab workshop schedule) and will help connect researchers across campus who are using digital humanities tools.

Also at the September meeting, Barbara Parmenter (Senior Lecturer, UEP) was elected Chair of the Committee.

At our December meeting, David Kahle presented the draft report of the Data Intensive Studies Center’s (DISC) sub-committee for Support Services explaining the committee’s vision for how the services structure for Tufts faculty and students who are or may be using data intensive studies for research or teaching. The challenge for DISC is to create a distributed network of services to faculty and students, not just a center. The Service Sub-Committee’s draft recommendations focused on:

- People
  - Align current major service providers
  - Clear roles and responsibilities
  - Plan for a complement of staff who have deep knowledge in various fields

- Services - Orchestrate services around life cycles:
Research support – conception to grant to implementation to dissemination to archiving
Data – identification, acquisition, storage, access, archiving

- Places – layer physical and virtual touch points:
  - DISCovery Hub (center)
  - DISCovery Labs (on each campus – model is Data Lab on Medford Campus)
  - DISCovery Portal – kind of like Access Tufts but for DISC research/teaching
  - Local DISCovery – bring DISC to classrooms

- Resources

We spent the remaining time mostly discussing avenues to get faculty feedback on DISC and on IT issues in general, and how faculty can bring concerns to the Tufts administration and IT groups. Because different departments differ significantly in IT and data needs, we discussed combining a variety of methods:

- Revival of the Faculty Technology Liaison Program (FTLP) - Barbara Parmenter (UEP) felt this had been a useful program for disseminating information to IT groups and to a more limited extent hearing faculty concerns and feedback in a general way. The AS&E Work/Life Liaison program was modeled on FTLP (Barbara had made the suggestion to the Work/Life Committee based on her FTLP experience) and this has been successful in that regard. Note the Work/Life Committee drives the Liaison meeting agenda. The previous FTLP meetings were driven by Educational Technology. Both models seemed to work but we should discuss if we want to revive this. There is a Work/Life Liaison meeting once per semester – similar to the FTLP program when it was running.

- A special gathering of select interested faculty from across fields, similar to the Digital Humanities gathering in Spring 2017 (we might consider having separate gatherings for research and teaching) – the aim is to foster discussion and collaboration across fields, to introduce people to each other, and to go deep into needs, ideas, opportunities.

- Visits to individual department meetings and/or having special department workshops

- Having a general workshop open to any faculty – suggestion was to include that in the University Teaching Symposium

The general feeling was that a combination of methods might be useful, taking into account the goals (e.g., information dissemination; fostering creative collaborations; expression of faculty concerns/suggestions) and departments (e.g., in a large department, a department specific gathering might be useful).

We had been planning to continue this discussion in our May meeting, and creating a good structure for two-way communication between faculty and technology experts was one of David Kahle’s hopes for the Faculty IT Committee. We expect to follow up on this and the DISC initiative in the coming year.

We have not yet elected a chair for the 2018-2019 year.